THE Reconstructionist

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the Reconstructionist

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EDITORIALS

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE UNITED JEWISH APPEAL

THERE will be no United Jewish Appeal in 1945. Instead, the three organizations represented will appeal separately to the community. Since Reconstructionism regards the maximum of collaboration by Jewish organizations as one of its fundamental principles, we cannot but deplore the inability of the Joint Distribution Committee and the United Palestine Appeal to agree on the basis of a joint campaign. The National Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, through which, in any event, the major part of the funds for both causes will be raised, made an earnest attempt to preserve the partnership, but was not successful. We believe that the rank and file of American Jewry is with us in wishing that, if at all possible, an attempt will still be made to run a joint campaign.

To say this involves no criticism of either the J.D.C. or the U.P.A. Until we achieve in America the sort of integrated democratic Jewish community organization, on both a local and national scale, which Reconstructionism advocates, we must expect separate organizations to work independently whenever they find it to their advantage to do so. Whether, in the present instance, it is really more advantageous for either the J.D.C. or the U.P.A. to run a separate campaign than to accept a basis of agreement to which the other party would assent, we are not in a position to know, for details of the negotiations leading to the dissolution of the U.J.A. have so far been withheld. But we do know the disadvantages for the community as a whole resulting from the failure of the two principal organizations to find a basis for united action.

The vast majority of American Jews who want to help their fellow-Jews in other lands survive and rehabilitate themselves after the war want also to participate in establishing the Jewish national home. Zionists and Zionist sympathizers, on their part, want also to do what they can to relieve Jewish victims of persecution and war overseas. Now this unity of American Jewish purpose will not only be obscured by the dissolution of the U.J.A.; it will even be endangered. The competitive appeals of the two organizations will almost inevitably lead them to disparage each other's importance, and the appeals of rival leaders to loyalty will tend to divide the Jewish public into two camps. In the present state of Jewish affairs, with so many unsolved problems confronting Jewry and with the crying

need for unity against the attacks of strong fascist-minded foes, Jews can ill afford the luxury of internal strife and must be constantly on their guard against any situation which may tend to foment such strife.

Does this mean that we favor unity at any price? Not at all. Reconstructionism does, to be sure, advocate the maximum of collaboration among Jewish groups and associations in order to speed the evolution of an integral and democratic Jewish community in America. But it regards such a development as neither possible nor desirable unless the rehabilitation of the Jewish National Home is recognized as a major purpose of American Jewish communal life. The Reconstructionist seal represents Palestine as the hub of that wheel which is emblematic of Jewish life as we would wish to reconstruct it. We admit that there is some validity to the argument in favor of a separate U.P.A. drive on the ground that it affords a better opportunity than a joint drive for educating the American Jewish public in Zionism. But this advantage is not so great as it appears to be. There are other and better methods of educating the public than through appeals for funds. For even when such appeals are made by Zionist organizations exclusively, their educational value is likely to be vitiated by the desire of the solicitors of funds to ingratiate themselves with the prospective donors by not "raising an argument." Only when Zionist education is accepted as an end in itself and not as a "sales talk" for raising funds, will it be conducted effectively.

Meanwhile, by failing to collaborate with non-Zionists through the U.J.A., Zionists would be neglecting an educational opportunity to impress on Jews the many common interests in which all Jews share, over and above whatever common religious convictions may be theirs. The realization by Jews of the many interests they have in common is indispensable to their viewing Judaism not as a religious denomination but as a civilization, and, until American Jews view Judaism in that light, their tie to Zionism will, at best, be only a Platonic one.

But bad as the situation is, it could be even worse. We are happy to see that both Paul Baerwald, chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee, and Rabbi James G. Heller, chairman of the United Palestine Appeal, are not insensitive to the dangers involved in the separation and intend to do their best to keep these at a minimum. In their respective statements, each of them scrupulously avoids anything that smacks of polemics. Moreover, at the instance of the National Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, both the U.P.A. and the J.D.C. have agreed that in all cities where there are Welfare Funds, including New York City with its more than 2,000,000 Jews united drives should be conducted. Whether these precautions will be sufficient to avert the evils usually resulting from the competition of two such immense fund-raising efforts remains to be seen.

At all events, we urge our readers to do all in their power to seek united campaigns in their own communities, to insure that the U.P.A. receives adequate budgetary recognition in any joint local campaign, and, where efforts at uniting the local campaigns fail, to work for the success of both drives, since both causes are worthy of generous support.

THE CHALLENGE OF RABBI ZOLLI'S CONVERSION

THE dramatic announcement of the conversion of Rabbi Israel Zolli to Catholicism has been the cause of consternation among Jews everywhere. Nothing in his early career would have led one to suspect such a denouement. Born in the city of Brod, a

center of intensive Jewish life, he received his rabbinic education in Vienna. He served in Trieste for a time as assistant to Rabbi Tzevi Peretz Chayes, who held him in high esteem and recommended him as his successor to the chief rabbinate of Trieste. From that post he was called to the chief rabbinate of Rome.

What led him to embrace Catholicism—was it conviction or personal ambition? That question which seems uppermost in people's minds, is hard to answer. In the first place, motivations, in general, are difficult to fathom. In addition, the case of Zolli is involved with many circumstantial factors not easily analyzed. He is known to have been an admirer of Jesus for a long time. He was a pro-fascist before fascism in Italy was identified with anti-Semitism. He was *persona non grata* with the Jewish community after going underground when the Nazis came to Italy. He was harbored for a long period with Catholic families toward whom he felt a deep sense of gratitude, and who, in turn, must have sought to influence his thinking. His wife is said to be only half-Jewish, and his daughter is said to have married out of the faith. To what extent any or all of these factors operated nobody knows, perhaps Zolli himself least of all.

Idle speculations concerning Zolli's reasons for deserting his people at this most crucial time in their history will go on, no doubt. And we may be sure that many Jews will devote energies to a denunciation of his act. But this will not bring him back to the fold. Nor will further discussion of the details of his conversion avail to deter others from following his example. Discussion of his conversion can be of value only if it leads us to face the fact that, to keep Jews loyal to Judaism, whether in good times or in bad, one must give them a clear conception of Judaism and a compelling conviction of its worth.

Wherever Jews live in the Diaspora, they are bound to be subject to the stresses and tensions to which all minorities are exposed. They will be conscious of hostility; they will be drawn by the magnetic attraction of the majority culture and will tend to gravitate toward the periphery of Jewish life, where defections from the ranks are most likely to occur. They will be disturbed by doubts concerning the worthwhileness of being Jews, and they will be torn by intellectual conflicts regarding the cogency and validity of Jewish religious ideals. They will not necessarily have to go through precisely the same intellectual and social history as a Zolli in order to be tempted by other religions and cultures.

If we are not to be confronted with a wholesale desertion from Judaism we shall have to offer our generation a faith to live by in the modern world, religious beliefs that they can honestly hold and that respond to their most deep-seated spiritual needs, a culture that invests Jewish life with interest and beauty, ethical standards and ideals that give life direction and purpose and a spirit of dedication, communal institutions that make the Jew feel he is both wanted and needed by his fellow Jews, both cared for and depended upon. If we succeed in doing that, we need fear no desertions; Judaism will be of such worth to the Jew that he will not dream of exchanging it for any other form of community life, religious or secular.

The need for reconstructing Jewish life to yield these values is rendered the more imperative by desertions of men like Zolli. For, while many loyal Jews will have been shocked and angered by his apostasy, thousands of other Jews who now teeter on the edge of assimilation or worse will have been encouraged to take the plunge. Again, therefore, as many times in the past, we plead for more attention to the inner, spiritual problems of the contemporary Jew.

Philanthropy is important, and the fight against anti-Semitism must go on; but, if we do nothing to strengthen the spiritual and moral fiber of Jews, they will not be able to resist the seductive attraction of other faiths. Unless we can demonstrate to inquiring young minds that the Zollis are wrong, that the Werfels and the Asches, who swing into the orbit of Christianity, have been misled, we shall be draining ourselves of our inner resources, and ultimately weakening the will to fight our external foes.

It is futile merely to cry for a *return* to the synagogue, and a *return* to the school. We must, above all, build the kind of synagogues and schools which shall teach a vital and relevant Judaism, a Judaism for which Jews will be willing to sacrifice, if sacrifice be required. We cannot exonerate ourselves by blaming defection from Judaism solely on the personal weakness of those who desert it. We can only do so by fortifying our young people so that they may be able to resist all temptations, even those of the most glamorous and "successful" faiths. This is the lesson which the depressing incident of Zolli's conversion should hold out to us.

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OR UNIVERSITY OF JUDAISM?

RARELY does an anniversary celebration in itself assume as much historic and communal significance as did the convocation called by the Jewish Theological Seminary on February 4th, 1945, to record the thirty-fifth year of the founding of its Teachers Institute. This event is notable for two outstanding occurrences, the recognition given to Jewish education as a profession and the pronouncement made concerning the need to expand the Seminary's program of Jewish education into that of a University of Judaism.

To commemorate this anniversary, the Jewish Theological Seminary conferred academic honors on Drs. Alexander M. Dushkin, Emanuel Gamoran, Leo L. Honor, Samuel Dinin, Zvi Sharfstein and Israel Konovitz in recognition of their services to Jewish education. A posthumous honor was also conferred upon Ben Rosen who recently died while engaged in the task of spreading communal interest in and responsibility for the Jewish training of our children.

It will be noted that these men have all attained leadership in their respective branches of Jewish educational endeavor, and that these branches have multiplied since the inception of the Jewish education profession. There are today, among graduates of the Institute and similar institutions, teachers of classes of elementary, secondary and college grades; specialists in pre-school child education; leaders of youth and adult study groups; experts in the teaching of Hebrew, Jewish history, Hebrew literature, Bible, religion, Talmud, current events, communal activities, Jewish music and art; educators engaged in administrative tasks as principals, supervisors, consultants and Bureau executives; educators engaged in the training of teachers for every type of Jewish school, in the preparation of text books and all sorts of educational material, or in conducting surveys and research projects. Thus has the profession of Jewish education become highly diversified since the Teachers Institute opened its classes and the Bureau of Jewish Education in New York began its communal program for Jewish education in 1910. It is natural, therefore, that attention should have been called, at this anniversary celebration, to the need for internal changes and for the development of departments within the Teachers Institute to keep pace with the expanding and varied Jewish educational needs in American Jewish life.

Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan, dean of the Institute, utilized this occasion, which marked both the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the Teachers Institute, and the 50th of the first graduation from the Seminary, to remind his audience that the Seminary had met two crises in its existence and had undergone two metamorphoses, emerging stronger and wider in its functions and in its influences. He directed attention to critical events of recent years and pointed out the direction of the new metamorphosis through which the Seminary is now passing and through which it must pass, if it is to keep up with the changing conditions in American Jewish life. Already, the Seminary has multiplied its departments, so as to advance Torah, through the most exacting disciplines of academic scholarship as well as through the most popular form of mass instruction—the radio.

But Dr. Kaplan urged that, in view of the increasing complexity of Jewish community life in post-war America, the Seminary assume even greater responsibilities and develop new departments which will produce trained workers and leaders, not only in the rabbinical and educational fields, but also in the fields of social and communal service and in those of esthetic and literary self-expression. Even the rabbinical school would have to intensify and diversify the functional training of its students. Some students would train for scholarship, some for pastoral and congregational duties, and some for communal leadership. Corresponding diversification of training would have to take place in the other schools or departments of the Seminary.

The core or the essence of the training, however, which would unify and inspire all the faculties and all the students in these various schools and departments, should continue to be Torah or the Jewish religious approach to life and knowledge. Since the Seminary will be serving in manifold areas of Jewish learning and living, it should change its name to correspond to the wider scope of its program. As it aims at being more than a school of theology, it ought no longer to call itself the "Jewish Theological Seminary of America," but take some such name as "University of Judaism." It should endeavor to become the American center of Torah, even as the Hebrew University in Jerusalem has come to serve the needs of the Jewish National Home.

From the viewpoint of Judaism as a religious civilization, these suggested changes are definitely called for. The name "Jewish Theological Seminary" belongs to a denominational pattern which regards Judaism as the attempt to give effect to certain specific theological doctrines. The term "university," however, implies the effort to bring into organic relationship all the available knowledge which can help to guide and give direction to Jewish life. The realistic recognition that Jewish life is too diversified to be served by a single type of leader, the rabbi, and by a single form of institution, the synagogue, will certainly help the Seminary (or rather the projected University of Judaism) to extend its influence and to become a greater force for the unification and sanctification of Jewish life.

REALITIES AND VALUES

TWO IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL bodies have recently given support to Zionist aspirations for a Jewish Palestine —the World Trade Union Conference in London and the Inter-American Conference in Mexico City. This is more than coincidence. The forces of democracy opposed to economic exploitation and imperialism recognize the justice of Zionist claims. They see in the assertion of Jewish rights with respect to Palestine a cor-

ollary of those democratic principles on which their own rights rest. In the language of the Inter-American Conference resolution, — *"In accordance with the self-determination of nations traditionally proclaimed by the American republics and the United Nations,* Palestine should become as soon as possible a free, sovereign and democratic Jewish state" (italics ours).

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At a meeting of the Senate Agricultural Committee to consider the appointment of Aubrey Williams as Rural Electrification Administrator, the nominee was asked whether or not he believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ. He replied, "That is a matter between me and my God." What irks us is that he had to reply at all. The question should immediately have been ruled out of order. Senators are pledged to support the Constitution of the United States and that Constitution prohibits Congress from making any law "respecting an establishment of religion." To demand adherence to any specific religious tenet as a requirement for holding office is, in effect, establishing a particular religion, for it gives to the faith which holds that tenet a privileged position. Any Senator who would apply such a test as a qualification for appointment to office offends the spirit, if not the letter, of the Constitution. He deserves to be impeached

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The Hebrew University in Jerusalem has decided to erect a museum to house the cultural relics of destroyed European Jewish communities. How times have changed! Not many decades ago, relics of Jewish life in Paletine were sought after by European and American Jewish museums to save them from being lost. Today Palestine has become the center of Jewish life. It not only plays the leading role in rescue work and the salvaging of human lives; it also redeems the products of Jewish cultural creativity in Europe from oblivion, and the love and labor that were invested in them from futility.

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The Palestine Economic Corporation is now selling stock to increase the capital necessary for its expanded program. Fifteen thousand shares are available, at $100 a share. The PEC is not asking for contributions; it is asking that American Jews who can should invest in the future of Palestine. The investments are designed to increase the economic absorptive capacity of the land by stimulating constructive industrial and agricultural enterprises. This is an excellent opportunity for American Jews to demonstrate that they believe in Jewish Palestine, not only as an article of faith, and not merely as a philanthropic venture, but as a healthy going concern. To borrow a slogan: Don't sell Palestine short! Buy shares in the PEC!

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H. R. 1588 is the official number of a bill, introduced by Rep. Inshaw a month ago, prohibiting "the conducting of certain foreign - language schools," in order to "defend" the United States. A foreign-language school is one using a language other than English for the purpose, "either wholly or in part," of "propagandizing, proselyting, inculcating or indoctrinating the pupils thereof with, or to, the ideology, the culture, or the racial, cultural, economic, or military superiority of any race, foreign country, or foreign government." According to that definition, a teacher in a Hebrew school, or Yiddish school, would be committing a felony if he told the children that the Histadrut in Palestine had a better program than the A. F. of L. Obviously, this is hysterical legislation, designed to regiment education, and suppress free expression. It should be fought by all freedom-loving Americans.

Vindication of Traditionalism

By JACOB B. AGUS

IN his article on "Democracy and Theocracy," * Eugene Kohn points out the logical consequences implied in the modern rejection of supernaturalism and the concomitant substitution of the democratic spirit for the dogmas of theocracy. With all his reverence for tradition and his keen appreciation of religious values, he nevertheless arrives at conclusions, which, in my opinion, are basically erroneous. The vigor of his logic leads him to recommendations which would, if carried out, radically alter the essential nature of Judaism and transform it into an uneasy conglomeration of societies, trafficking with the clichés and fads of modernity.

To me, Rabbi Kohn's essay is representative of a certain kind of thinking within the Reconstructionist movement that is, for all its brilliance and boldness, philosophically untenable, and historically incorrect. With due apologies to the author, I wish to use his essay as an illustration of the wrong approach to the solution of the problem of Judaism and the Jewish status in America.

Revolution or Evolution

Rabbi Kohn begins his argument with an analysis of the wide and deep gulf that extends between the basic layers of conviction in traditional Judaism and the modern mentality. The existence of this gulf is undeniable. Looking inwardly in an earnest attempt to compose our own minds or looking outwardly at the shattered ruins of what once was the time-defying rugged edifice of Judaism, we cannot fail to notice the reality of this gulf. There is certainly nothing to be gained by pretending that this yawning chasm does not exist or by trying to sermonize it out of existence. Such attempts may be useful in keeping up the morale of the faithful for a brief period of grace, but cannot meet, much less overcome, the powerful mental and social forces that have brought about the deep chasm which now separates the fundamentalist mentality from that of the modern Jew.

There are two methods by which one may seek to bridge this gulf. One may either ascend in thought to the highest peak of traditional Judaism and proceed to examine from that point what elements of the modern spirit bear the indelible stamp of truth and must be assimilated into the body of the ancient faith, or one may plunge bodily into the seething foam of the latest wave of opinion and, when the confused whirling is over, one may pick and choose what elements of tradition may fittingly be carried over to the shore of modernity. It may seem that the difference between these two ways of attacking the problem is only one of method, not of substance. But, then, we learn from the history of philosophy that it is the method which in most cases determines the philosophy of the thinker. If men were all-wise and immortal, the differences in method and starting point would be cancelled out in the final result. Since this is not the case, the choice of a vantage point and method of attack are generally decisive in the achievement of a world-view. Thus, Henry Sidgwick, in his classic study of the history of ethics, points out that, in the history of European thought, two types of ethical philosophy developed out of the two different ways of formulating the fundamental question of ethics, "What is the good?" or "What

* This article appeard in THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST, Vol. X, No. 12. In our next issue we will publish a reply by Rabbi Kohn to Dr. Agus's criticism.

is right?" In the case of religion, which is the product of the reaction of the total personality to the universe, we should expect the effect of starting point and method to be even more far-reaching.

Now, it may fairly be maintained that Reform chose the latter method of surmounting the gulf. Its successes and failures, therefore, represent an accurate measure of the values and dangers of this method. The great founders of Reform ideology consciously rejected the principles and practice of Orthodoxy in the name of the beliefs and opinions of their day. Far from seeking to achieve a measure of continuity with the heritage of tradition, they pointed with pride to their "breach" with the past, as a patent of liberalism. Indeed, in most cases, the break with the past was decisive and all-inclusive. A study of the philosophies of great Reform thinkers reveals that their basic conceptions were derived from their contemporary intellectual environment — nineteenth century cosmopolitanism, abstract Hegelianism and Protestant anti-ritualism. The real authorities of their outlook on life were Kant, Fichte, Hegel or Lotze, not Maimonides or Rabbi Akiba.

In recent years, there have been earnest and mighty efforts to bring Reform closer to the wellsprings of tradition, but the Reform method remains recognizably the same: it assumes the normal unbridgeability of the gulf, it takes for granted the validity of the dogmas of the contemporary world, and it demands that Judaism be adapted to them.

The second method was implied in the thought of the scholarly founders of Conservative Judaism, but its full implications have not yet been explored. It involves the following assumptions: (1) Life is prior to thought, and tradition, in the case of a living people, is, apart from its inherent truth, related to the spirit of the nation as the body is to the soul. (2) In the progressive adaptation of traditional forms and ceremonies to the changing circumstances of a people, attention should be given to the manner in which customs are related to the basic pattern of piety in the actual life of the people, not only to their abstract significance, for the psychology of religion is as important in assaying the character of proposed modifications as the study of the philosophy of religion. (3) In the light of history, many a contemporary absolute turns out to be of only relative value and the God of Israel has outlived many an "idol of the market place." (4) The beliefs dominant in our own era should be subjected to a critical evaluation, equally as much as the beliefs of the past, and new truths should be proven workable, before they are widely applied. (5) When two interpretations of texts and historical events are logically possible, the one representing the authors and heroes of our faith in the best light should be accepted and taught, for reverence in religion is itself the surest avenue to truth. (6) Above all, we should be guided in the determination of the values and forms of the future by the sentiments and aspirations of those to whom Judaism is primarily life and only secondarily a problem, not those for whom the contrary is the case. The argument of this essay is an attempt to show the validity of the second method and the wide range of its applicability. More than it is a criticism of specific errors, my thesis is a plea for a basic attitude and for the employment of a method in religious interpretation that is true to the historical evolution of religion and the essential nature of piety.

Supernaturalism vs. Naturalism

Rabbi Kohn resorts to the first method. He identifies himself with the emotional and intellectual atmosphere on the other side of the gulf and then wonders how a democrat and a naturalist can make his

peace with a tradition that is supernaturalist and theocratic. We are presented with two horns of a dilemma that seem to leave no peace of mind for any one who would take a middle of the road position. But, if we free ourselves from the spell of modern shibboleths and facile generalizations, the dilemma appears in a wholly different light.

Let us examine these two sets of terms. The term, *supernaturalist,* and the corresponding term, *naturalist,* are replete with ambiguities. Professors Lovejoy and Boaz, in their introduction to the "History of Primitivism," list 614 different meanings of the word *nature.* It has been said that all ethical philosophies, from Epicurus to Spinoza and from Maimonides to Herbert Spencer, could be expressed in the maxim of "living according to nature." Manifestly, the term *supernatural* has a corresponding range of meanings. For our purpose, it is sufficient to take the term *supernatural* in its two main denotations—the naive and the subtle. It is to the first meaning that Rabbi Kohn undoubtedly refers — the supernatural in the sense intended by anthropologists, as descriptive of the religion of primitive peoples. This word calls to mind the picture of God as a white-bearded old man of colossal and radiant stature, dwelling with His retinue of archangels, in a magnificent palace in the distant heavens. No doubt many Jews naively conceived of God in this fashion. We have the word of R. Abraham Ibn David to the effect that many rabbis in his day thought of God in corporeal terms. To the naive, unphilosophical Jew, the doctrine of revelation at Sinai evoked the image of a kindly master imparting instruction to his favorite pupil. When this same philosophically naive Jew absorbs the skeptical modern spirit, more through an osmosis-like process than through a sustained logical effort, he naturally comes to scorn his former belief, or what he conceives to be the belief of his parents. He senses its utter incongruity with the modern world and he breaks with the tradition of Orthodoxy. He is now a naturalist, in a general sort of way.

Should Judaism then too be reconstructed as a naturalist faith, in order to meet the objections of the formerly naive supernaturalist, now turned naive naturalist? It seems obvious to me that this demand is neither right nor wise. For we must remember that naturalism is philosophically equally as naive as supernaturalism, though it happens to be the favorite philosophy of social liberals and humanists at the present moment. There are many forms of naturalism and many definitions of it. But, the underlying, all - embracing naturalistic principle is the assumption that physical matter or force, or energy, is the one real force in the universe and that the methods of science in dealing with matter are sufficient for the understanding of the mystery of existence. In our generation, naturalistic philosophies include chapters on the function of religion, but the place of religion in any thoroughly naturalistic system is, when stripped of euphemisms, so small as to be indistinguishable from the zero of exact mathematics. Naturalism is willing to agree that, on the human level, there are motives and factors of a moral and dedicatory character that may, in their totality, be denominated as God. But, these motives or ideals are declared to be merely epiphenomena, accidental and transitory by-products of the "real" forces in nature, like foam on the wave of the deep.

Now, if naturalism were the sum total of the proven truths of human knowledge, we should, of course, be compelled to discard the very basis of our faith. As a matter of fact, however, this is far from being the case. The weight of philosophical opinion is even today non-naturalistic. I, as one of the so-called

traditionalists, happen to be convinced that naturalism is a very shallow philosophy, deriving its vogue from the marvelous successes of science, not from any unanswerable logic. In my view, naturalism is sheer unanalytical naiveté, posing as philosophy.

It will be readily admitted that the gulf between naive Judaism and naive naturalism is indeed impassable. If these were the only alternatives faced by thoughtful Jews, then the Reform method would be the only logical one. This, however, is happily not so. The problem can and should be handled on a far higher plane. The stream of Jewish thought flowed along many levels as does the stream of modern thought. Judaism, as represented by its best minds, and modern philosophy, in its deepest strata, are not mutually exclusive. In its higher levels, Judaism was not a religion of supernaturalism, but of transcendentalism —that is, it was founded on the belief in a God, who is other than the realm of physical nature. This conception of God is certainly not excluded *ab initio* in modern philosophy.

Does it mean then that the concept of revelation of medieval Jewish philosophy need not be reinterpreted in order that it may accord with modern principles of science and psychology? By no means. We have travelled far in thought and experience since the days of Saadia and Maimonides. It were a tragedy indeed if our religion failed to be sensitive to the intellectual climate of our times. Judaism can only gain by the absorption of all that was noble in the last millenium of spiritual adventure of the human mind. But, instead of a sharp antithesis between two irreconcilable ages, we note the possibility of a continuous course of development. It follows that the new concept of revelation which we are called upon to evolve will require changes of an evolutionary rather than of a revolutionary character in Jewish thought, observance, and organization.

Democracy vs. Theocracy

The same analysis applies to the second contrast mentioned by Rabbi Kohn —the one between theocracy and democracy. On the unanalytical level that this problem is generally posed, the contrast is indeed vast and stubborn. On this level, theocracy is conceived as a Divine constitution, handed down, complete in every detail, from God to Moses and from Moses to those who "sit in his seat" until the present day. In a similarly uncritical spirit, democracy is accorded virtual worship today as the ultimate consummation of the Divine intention, "the most complete realization of the image of God in him (man)." Rabbi Kohn pleads for "the sort of religion that recognizes the democratic process itself as the assertion of God's sovereignty."

On this level, the gulf between the traditional and modern conceptions is indeed unbridgeable. But, is this the level of highest thinking either in Judaism or in modern society? I submit that the problem is far more complex, neither theocracy nor democracy being a simple doctrine.

First, as to theocracy. It would be easy to cite hundreds of passages from Midrashic and Talmudic literature in proof of the democratic elements in Jewish tradition. Indeed, democracy and theocracy were so intimately interwoven in the Jewish religion as to be inseparable. However, such quotations would serve no useful purpose and would only result in confounding confusion still further.

Let us analyze the problem. Suppose we know what the Will of God is; would any one say that, in the name of human freedom, we should not endeavor to conform to it? Clearly, that would

be a paradoxical form of being religious. If man partakes of the Divine, then is the Law of God surely not foreign to the nature of man. To seek to make the Will of God triumphant in our lives and in society is obviously the minimum message of all religion. Theocracy, then, is the goal of all our strivings. If God is more than a word standing for the mathematical total of human aspirations, if He be an eternal Principle standing outside the flux of events in nature, no other attitude is possible. One may debate as to whether or not any particular law derives from the authority of God but no one who subscribes to a religious view of the universe, would deny that, virtually as a matter of definition, the Will of God should be obeyed.

On the other hand, the concept of democracy too requires careful definition and analysis. Are we willing to say, as some Reconstructionist writers imply, that the people are God and that the voice of the people is the voice of God? Obviously, such a position would negate all ethical standards and judgments. If any human voice comes nearest to echoing the voice of God, it is the "still small voice" of conscience, not the rumble of the massed crowds.

Democracy may be the best system of government so far discovered but it surely is not a method of discovering truth or spiritual guidance. If you wish to find out what good music, genuine literature, or true scientific theory is, would you resort to a national election? Obviously, in a realm of values, the principle of hierarchy, not of equality, prevails. What saves democracy from degenerating into a tyranny of the demos, as Plato feared, is a certain reverence for authority and learning that interpenetrates the whole nation. The values that the few apprehend and cultivate become in this fashion the property of all the people. While it is true that all ideals find their ultimate proving ground in the hustle and bustle of the market place, it is also true that the discoverers and exponents of all ideals are the aristocrats of the spirit. In the well-nigh mystical adoration of democracy that has become fashionable of late, it is often overlooked that, in questions of truth and beauty and goodness, what matters is *the best judgment of those best qualified to judge.* If religion then be more than a form of associated life, or to put it more specifically, if religion be truth, then it cannot be subject to the superficial operation of the democratic method, the counting of ayes and nays. It thus appears that reverence for the authority of those best qualified to judge and a consequent measure of group discipline are the first conditions of a healthy religious life.

Does this analysis resolve the antithesis between the theocracy of tradition and the democracy of the modern spirit? By no means, but it reveals the interrelationship of the two extremes. The chasm is seen to be levelled to a degree where orderly progress becomes possible. The concept of absolute authority of the past as it crystallized in the post-Shulhan Arukh era will perforce have to be modified, but it should not be replaced by an unrestrained relativism, which blesses and consecrates every whim and caprice of the people.

Panacea of Community Organization

Rabbi Kohn sees the solution of the problem of the Jewish religion in the community form of organization, which is founded on the concept of unity in diversity. He would assign to the democratic community the task of drafting new legislation for the regulation of Jewish social relations affecting the entire community. The matter of developing "Jewish ritual," on the other hand, he would give over "to individuals and

to voluntary organizations of like-minded persons." Now, there is general agreement regarding the need of united action on the part of all organizations in the community in certain limited spheres. The question at issue is whether the synagogue or the community shall become the basic unit of organization. Here, we are concerned with the bearing of this question on the fortunes and future of the Jewish religion.

To begin with, then, we note that the specific problems of the Jewish religion, which the community organization is intended to solve, are left to "voluntary organizations," formed for the purpose of cherishing their "diverse" interpretations of Judaism. These voluntary organizations — synagogues, schools, seminaries, etc. — are trying to function even now, with indifferent success. The question is, what help would they get from the community organization for their efforts? —Oh, yes, the "rituals" that the various individuals are willing to accept would be "registered" with the community. That surely would be a great help!

Let us remember that the vitalization of the Jewish religion is the problem under consideration. Recognizing that the Jewish religion is not an abstraction but "a religious civilization," it becomes our next task to see to it that all elements of civilization are mobilized in its behalf. It follows that we must not allow the synagogue to be dissociated from the vital interests of Jews. Our aim must be to return to the synagogue the life blood of Israel that has ebbed away from it and to make the synagogue of our day that which it has always been, the focus of Israel's life and aspirations. The term synagogue in this connection may stand for one synagogue, as in small communities or for an association of synagogues. The central point to bear in mind is that, in the organization of American Israel, expression shoud be given to the principle that religion is the soul and substance of Jewish life.

However, the sorry fact that Orthodox synagogues and Reform temples can rarely be brought to a common meeting ground and the still more ominous circumstance that large numbers of Jewish people refuse to affiliate with any kind of religious organization has led some Reconstructionists to shift the center of gravity from the synagogue to the community. In their concern for the welfare of the "perplexed" Jews, the non-religious who find themselves pressed into the mold of a religious community, they would add perplexities to the presently unperplexed, forgetting that their professed goal is the vitalization of Judaism.

For consider how the remedy of community organization would actually operate. Every Jew will be encouraged to feel that he belongs to the Jewish nationality and that his primary allegiance belongs to the community as a whole. As to religious duties, he would be told that Judaism is no longer a unified system of ways of living, based upon a rich continuous heritage of thought and experience, but that it is now founded on the democratic principle of unity in diversity. It will not be difficult to sell any fair specimen of our unhappily confused and ignorant and materialistic masses on the proposition of unity. Hitler has done that. Also, the relentless pressure of the outside environment and the social realities of American community life all help to bring about a measure of unity. It should further be remembered that, in most cases, this principle implies no duties on the part of the individual Jew. The community organization specializes in offering the kind of services that are right down the alley of most people in any event.

The Danger of Legitimizing Diversity

As to the element of "diversity," on the other hand, the situation is completely reversed. Under this heading, there is comprised all that makes Judaism significant and worth living, the whole hierarchy of values that towers above the humdrum, the mediocre and the temporary fad. The love of Zion and Torah and learning, the Sabbath and the holidays — all belong under this heading. Now, what will or can the community do to stimulate increased loyalty to these "diversities"? What, indeed, save to shunt them off the main highway of Jewish loyalty and leave them stranded on the sidelines as so many esoteric practices?

No one today wishes to compel any Jew to observe any of the *mitzvot*. But, the conscious application of the principle of voluntarism, as part of a philosophy in which observers and non-observers would be placed on an equal footing in terms of Jewishness, is a totally different matter. There is all the difference in the world between saying that Judaism, in whole or in part, is not compulsory and maintaining the proposition that the primary demand of Judaism itself is to belong to the over-all community organization and that, beyond that point, every Jew is bidden to choose whatever activities or loyalties appeal to him most.

The latter construction of the principle of freedom is implied in the community form of organization. Its logical implications and, therefore, its eventual social consequences are ominous. For it reduces Jewish religious affiliation to the level of sectarianism and it transfers the fund of vague and potent loyalty associated with the word "Jew" to the innocuous and religiously inane organization, standing for "unity." A considerable force of undirected loyalty still attaches to the ideal of "being a good Jew." The recognition of the potentialities inherent in this ideal is in fact the central point in the whole range of Reconstructionist thought. But, the proposal to reorganize Jewish life on the basis of community democracy, in which the synagogue and its message are placed in the position of tolerated "diversities" is the one sure way of deflecting this force away from religious and other hierarchical values and toward secularist and horizontal channels. If Reconstructionism stands for the principle that the Jewish religion and Jewish social and cultural expressions are inseparable and if it really intends to maintain religion as the central theme of Jewish culture, then, is it not plain that, in proposing to relegate religious practice and theory to the sidelines, it actually cuts religion off from its roots in the soil of Jewish life, thereby stultifying its own analysis of Judaism?

This argument is not at all academic in nature. Democratic community organizations are in fact springing up all over the country and those who are concerned with the problem of advancing Judaism would do well to study how such organizations actually operate. The movement is still in its initial stages, but its inherent tendency to narrow the field of congregational activity, especially in smaller communities, and to sap the social and intellectual energy stored in the synagogue is already apparent. Congregational work tends to be reduced to what is purely "spiritual" in character, with consequences that are not difficult to foresee.

European Jewish consistories and Kehillahs always included the synagogue as their main institution. That is why any comparison with the community organizations of pre-Hitlerian European countries is totally misleading. Community organization, on the American scene, is assuming a pattern, which, if allowed to

expand, would radically alter the scale of values in Jewish life, divorcing religious loyalty from any direct connection with one's duties as a Jew.

Clearly, then, the slogans of democracy are totally irrelevant to the problem of bringing about a renaissance of Judaism. On the intellectual level, democracy is a meaningless shibboleth. Great truths should be tested in the actual lives of people, of course, but, to rely upon the unrestrained processes of democracy for the discovery of truth and ideal values is to submit a petition of intellectual bankruptcy. Again, on the level of institutional organizations, this slogan amounts to a sanctioning of religious indifference. Further, in its emphasis on the rightness and validity of the majority opinion, this misunderstood ideal, taken out of its proper sphere, would deprive the minority of the cultured and the faithful and the earnest of whatever degree of social approval and prestige they now enjoy. Thus, instead of ameliorating the existing situation, the so-called emphasis on democracy could only accelerate the course of deterioration in respect of both theory and practice.

Law and Life

To return to the problem of reconciling Jewish law with Jewish life, I wish to recall to the reader's attention a principle that was explained in an earlier essay*—to wit, that the character of Jewish piety consists in the attempt to conform to the expressed will of God. Piety, to the Jew, is not a matter of feeling so much as it is an awareness of directing one's life in accord with the eternal principles of God. Judaism without law, conceived as Divine, is therefore impossible.

Obviously, one may attempt to ignore the psychical potencies inherent in the momentum of Jewish piety and strike out boldly on a new path in quest of a new faith. Hundreds of religions have been created in the full glare of history and there is no *a priori* reason why any such attempt should not succeed. I, for one, seriously doubt whether a "naturalistic" and "democratic" faith that does not dare to rise beyond the confines of common experience can ever generate enough religious enthusiasm to begin a viable and lasting career. Naturalism and rationalism are psychical abrasives, capable of whittling down and refining a living faith, but not of taking the place of faith. Modern ambiguities and philosophical double-talk aside, it is clear that the raw material of religion is always non-naturalistic and non-rationalistic. Without this raw material, theorists of religion are very much like those priests of the Holy Temple, during the Roman siege of Jerusalem, who, lacking the required animals for the ritual sacrifices, continued to perform the prescribed rites, as if nothing had happened — slaughtering and skinning animals that did not exist, and collecting and sprinkling blood that was not there.

We should not therefore attempt to substitute "feeling" for the waning piety of legalism — that is, to seek to invent rituals that will stir and move our people to enjoy a kind of religious experience. Such attempts should be explored and tested and, if proven successful, incorporated in modern Judaism. But, they cannot stand alone. Temporary successes, in the present state of confusion, are of no significance. In their steady retreat from the line of tradition, our people may be lured into many a way-station, which the unpracticed eye may easily mistake for a permanent abode. Whatever genuine piety exists today among our people is, as Prof. L. Ginsberg aptly put it, "the shadow of the past." It is only upon the foundations of the past that

* The Character of Jewish Piety, in The Reconstructionist, Vol. VII, No. 5.

the future of Judaism can be built with security.

Why then is the heritage of the past unworkable today? Because of a double break, occurring at both ends of the socio-religious ladder. On the level of religious leadership and intuitive apprehension of Divine truth, the old concept of revelation, has given way, in many instances, to a complete vacuum of convictions. In revolt against the extreme and naive absolutism of the past, many rabbis have fallen into an utterly anarchistic relativism, that is superficially glorified with the hazy sentiments and slogans of democracy. Similarly, on the level of popular practice, we are compelled to record an absolute chasm between the measure of observance that large numbers of our people regard as ideally binding upon them and the actual flouting of ritual laws in the lives of these same people. Thus the functioning of Judaism, either as a religion or as a religious civilization, is thwarted on both planes, of theory and practice.

It follows that, if we are to have a renaissance of Judaism in this country, we must attempt to heal two breaches—one intellectual and emotional, the other volitional and practical.

The first task is logically prior to the second, but in actual practice the two endeavors may be pursued simultaneously, for they will inevitably react upon each other. No theory of Judaism can be evolved in abstraction from the actual social environment, for Judaism is far more than a mere theory, which could conceivably be prefabricated in superheated brains. Suppose we do gather a group of master-scholars to deliberate and proclaim new principles; would they be heeded? Obviously the machinery for the translation of the insights of the few into the lives of the many has broken down. On the other hand, no revivalist campaign, even with limited objectives, can be launched without a set of convictions concerning the truth and value of Judaism in our day, a set of truths that is believed in fervently and ardently by an overwhelming number of rabbis.

We face here a vicious circle and, to break it, we must take the offensive on both levels at once. In practical work we assume the supreme value and truth of tradition, knowing that we do not deal for the most part with atheists, but with backsliders. Volitional and emotional elements are more important on this level than sheer dialectics. We cannot expect a theory of revelation that will satisfy the philosophers to accord with the lines of thinking of the average person. Long ago, Maimonides pointed out that there were in Judaism "necessary beliefs" and "true beliefs," and, in the former category, he listed the kind of beliefs that constituted virtually all of religion in the eyes of the average Jew. The "as if" attitude is inevitable in any living faith, shared by a whole people. But, on every level of thought, our religion should represent the very highest embodiment of truth and value, in so far as it is given to us to know truth and value.

It will still demand an act of faith, of course, but then no religion worthy of the name ever thrived on the obvious and the tautological only. Faith in God is and must remain the cornerstone of Judaism. Its rehabilitation in the face of modern skepticism should be our primary concern.

On the practical level, new rituals may or may not be of value, but the first consideration must be the rehabilitation of the healthy, devotional practices of tradition, which are alone capable of reconstituting Judaism as a going concern. Before this goal has been reached, all remedies will prove to be no more than temporary fads.

Another Chaplain Discusses Combat Religion

By DAVID I. GOLOVENSKY

THE stimulating article "A Chaplain Discusses Combat Religion" by Leon Rosenberg (December 1, 1944), should arouse others to crystallize and present their reactions to the significant phenomenon the author terms "combat religion." His provocative essay raises several controversial issues which should be soberly studied in the light of actual experience. And the Chaplain living and serving in the orbit of the military society is in a fortunate position to observe the manifestations and appraise the values of this unique type of religious expression.

I was not so much impressed by the facts he presents, many of which are commonly known and not subject to dispute, as I was by his particular formulation and evaluation of that substantive material. Thus this critique will deal primarily with his conclusions and *obiter dicta* rather than with the facts from which they were drawn.

Combat Religion Elementary But Not False

Let me first attempt to summarize his thesis and then proceed to analyze it. He speaks of the "increased attendance at services prior to the movement of a military unit into battle conditions" as a conspicuous feature of combat religion. He then proceeds to discuss the nature and likely effects of what he has so vaguely defined. These prayers before combat he describes as a selfish appeal for survival which has "much in common with the way primitive man must have reacted to the array of powers . . . he did not understand." This "may lead us to assume that religion has failed to keep pace with man's growing comprehension of the universe." But religion did advance "through several stages of psychological upgrading" which he then briefly traces from primitive animism to our modern advanced concept of religion. "The average man has failed to keep in touch with the development of religious thought . . . and so he proceeds to seek an orientation to self, society, and cosmos on the lower levels of superstition and irrationality." Thus combat religion, he contends, is not only a primitive form of religious expression but also a "cause for worry." He further advances the melancholy admonition that, unless a more rational concept of religion is furnished, "religion and the lives of these men (upon their return to normal society) will be for a long time impoverished." And those who return to testify to the saving grace they experienced may actually menace the future of true religion, for in them is found the germ of obscurantism, "which has always been an impediment to religion." The latter part of his article deals with his prognosis which I shall subsequently discuss.

I heartily agree with his basic premise that combat religion is an elementary form of religious expression. I further share his view that it is not founded upon a rational concept of the universe. I certainly endorse his plea for a program of religious training that will produce a more wholesome and sophisticated concept of religion. But I cannot accept his cynical attitude toward combat religion nor the completely negative and ominous evaluation he attaches to it. I feel that the author mistook two stages in the process of growth for two conflicting and opposing trends. I believe that he confuses the stimulus of the religious urge with the quality and character of its promise and potentialities. He condemns the seed to sterility before it is given a chance

to fructify. He accepts with certainty the concept of the evolutionary development of religion but patently ignores its corollary, the natural process of recapitulation in the individual soul. A religion whose only appeal is fear is not intrinsically false; it is a victim of arrested development. Its progress and growth were frozen at a low level.

Similarly, combat religion is not a monstrosity to be scorned. It is a seed that should be cultivated, nurtured and sublimated. Religion may be reached by a variety of diverse routes. Some find God through grief, others find Him in stress, still others through philosophic reflection and intellectual quest, and some G. I.'s are finding Him in a trench through fear of death. It is not so much the source of the religious dynamic that should concern us, nor the early forms it assumes, as its potential power and end product. Many of these youths are now receiving their primary course in religion. It is being administered by a spiritual shock treatment which reaches its painful climax in combat. They entered the service as religious illiterates, as the chaplain so aptly describes them. Can we reasonably expect a college campus cynic in his first violent spiritual crisis to respond in any other than a naive and primitive fashion? Theirs is nothing less than a normal and natural reaction. Yet how many in the past, who found God just that way, ultimately reached the highest level of religious thinking!

Combat Religion Better Than The Cynicism It Displaces

Then there is this question to be answered. Why does the author display greater disdain for combat religion than for the cynicism, skepticism and materialism which, in many instances, it displaces? Are these a more rational and enlightened world-view and life-philosophy than the obscurantist approach he identifies with combat religion? Are these attitudes any less an impediment to the progress of true religion than he conceives combat religion to represent? Are these ideologies intellectually more valid and spiritually more enriching than the religious notions he dissects?

Our sages, who preached such a lofty concept of God and religion, showed deeper understanding and sympathy for combat religion. While they preached the sublime concept of a God of love they nevertheless recognized that "the beginning of religious wisdom is the fear of the Lord." They did not scoff at a religion of fear. They welcomed it as the first step in the process of spiritual maturation.

But primitive concepts are not confined to religion. We find parallels in many realms of our moral and ethical life. We are all agreed that the goal of society is to cultivate inner disciplines leading men to honesty and morality. Yet many people practice honesty, which we regard as axiomatic and basic to a modern free society, only because they fear the consequences of detected fraud. Instead of the acquisitive instinct's being restrained by inner sanctions, it is checked by a fear of punitive measures. Surely that is a coarse and crude concept of honesty. Yet does the author deplore it and recommend "therapy," suggestive of a disease, or does he counsel culture to advance and elevate our ethical concept? Similarly, all too many conform to the moral code largely because they fear possible social censure and public disgrace. Does he here, too, demand "therapy" as he does for combat religion? Combat religion is part of a universal condition of moral, ethical and spiritual illiteracy and immaturity which should be advanced and sublimated to a higher level by the refining process of education. I do not "worry" about the "obscurantism" of those who testify that they

found saving grace in a trench, unless they are charlatans. To my mind they have caught the seed of religion, which, if watched and nurtured, can bloom forth into a redeeming philosophy. He condemns combat religion only because he attaches permanance to what should be but a transitional stage in the process of religious maturation.

Indications of a Religious Awakening

I might add that, while I do not claim that the stresses of military life are producing a religious revival, there are perceptible indications suggesting that such an awakening is possible. We should not dismiss the fact that many youths who, as civilians, spurned the synagogue are frequent visitors at the chapel. The Friday following my reading of Chaplain Rosenberg's article I took a poll of my congregation. I learned that sixty percent of those present have been attending services more regularly since they entered the Navy. We certainly cannot attribute this tendency, which I believe is general, to a fear fixation or combat religion. And the fact that a considerable proportion among them recently returned from combat zones should not be ignored. It is symptomatic that their desire to attend services, which may have been aroused by a fear hysteria, has not evaporated upon their return to these safe shores.

I am not contending that this establishes a religious revival or that conclusive inferences can be drawn. I know that a number of psychological and sociological factors which have little relevance to the religious urge are involved. I do maintain, however, that, if these religious manifestations are adequately stimulated, they may persist into civilian life.

The Chaplain's Role in "Reconverting" Servicemen to Civilian Life

I endorse his plea to mobilize our leaders and synagogues in an effort to treat this problem, but not because I regard combat religion as a source of "worry" and harm; rather because I believe it is capable of growth and maturation. Let us actualize the potential religious awakening and direct it towards a loftier religious rationale and outlook on life. Many religious and lay agencies can help, but, as Chaplain Rosenberg states, "the chaplain is in a rather felicitous position" to set in motion the machinery and serve as a guide in this new spiritual orientation. Military life is cultivating a new type of relationship between the youth and the chaplain, which should be brought into full play. In civilian ministry I have felt that the youth considered the rabbi as being of, but not in, his immediate world. Their mutuality may have been cordial but rarely intimate and dynamic. A barrier between pulpit and pew seemed to inhibit the youth from baring his delicate tensions and conflicts which, however, condition his thinking and behavior. I have always felt that the youth admitted his rabbi into the outer chambers but rarely invited him into the inner sanctum of his heart. My experience during the past eight months persuades me to believe that military life has penetrated part of that barrier. This affinity and rapport should be further explored and turned to fruitful use in the pursuit of our solution.

The recommended "virtues of simplicity, sincerity and sympathy" can prove most helpful. But these virtues must be buttressed by educational and psychological techniques, and a carefully devised reconversion program, reconversion from soldier to civilian and from a lower to a higher level of religious thinking. Hit-or-miss efforts by the rabbi or chaplain, no matter how pious and sincere his motive, cannot provide the answer. It is to be hoped that those qualified and equipped to furnish this desideratum will devise such a program to meet this crying need.

A Jewish School in a Housing Project

By SYLVAN H. KOHN

SETH Boyden Court is the name of a Federal Housing Project located in the city of Newark, half-way on the road to the adjoining city of Elizabeth. It is in a section practically devoid of residences and occupied almost entirely by factories and industrial plants. At one time a large amusement park stood there. Now several blocks of drab, brick, mutiple-family dwellings, with court yards and playgrounds, squat over the area. About 500 families live on the project and of these 150 are Jewish. They come from all corners of the community, from homes that were deemed by governmental authorities as no longer habitable, and the only requirement made of prospective tenants, other than moral decency, was that they earn no more than $25 weekly. All of the residents therefore fall in the lowest income bracket and many of them are partly or entirely unemployed because of heart ailments and other illnesses. One other fact regarding the location of the Project — it is at least two miles distant from any synagogue, Jewish school, or other Jewish institution.

Establishing the School

Three years ago a small committee of the Jewish tenants came to the office of the Jewish Education Association of Essex County and asked that we do something to afford the Jewish children of the Project an opportunity to receive some sort of Jewish education. Our first impulse was to see whether these children could not readily be integrated in the community Talmud Torah or in some congregational school. Since there was no such institution near-by, we thought the problem might be solved by our providing bus transportation for the children. But suddenly we found ourselves face to face with an unusual situation. The public schools attended by these youngsters were also a considerable distance away, and each morning and each afternoon the children were conveyed to and from school by bus. To expect the parents to subject them to a third round trip by bus daily was out of the question. Nor would a Jewish Sunday School program have solved our problem, since it would never have satisfied the parents in the least, most of them being of definite Orthodox leanings.

What then could be done? Start some religious instruction directly on the Project? This was not permitted according to governmental regulations which prohibit religious services or instruction by any denomination within the confines of any Federal property. Moreover, besides the matter of Jewish education, facilities for religious services were asked for by the parents and grandparents, almost none of whom could walk or would ride regularly to some remote synagogue. Fortunately we found, directly adjoining the Project, a vacant store in what had been a small, metal garage. This being the only place available in the entire neighborhood, we soon rented it, renovated it, and fitted it out as a Hebrew School classroom, furnishing it likewise with an Ark and the necessary equipment for services. However, we insisted, and the residents agreed without any question, that, despite their meagre means, they should pay for the rent, heat and all other expenses, if we undertook to provide them at our own cost with a satisfactory teacher. We took this poisition largely to encourage

a sense of responsibility on the part of the new group. And this has been the basic relationship between them and our Association during these past three years. A qualified Hebrew teacher is now instructing 40 children in this very inadequate but quite charmingly transformed tailor shop. At first, three sessions were held wekly. More recently this has been raised to four sessions.

The School Expands into A Jewish Center

The school which we have described is the major part but not the whole of this modest institution, now known as the Seth Boyden Jewish Center, which has become a self-respecting and a respected affiliate of our Jewish Education Association, with representation on our Board of Directors. Week-day, Sabbath and Holiday services are held there, conducted by several of the men themselves. And for the High Holy Days they rent somewhat larger quarters in a political club-house several blocks away.

In addition to the above, the group holds business and cultural meetings alternately twice monthly, celebrates American and Jewish holidays, has conducted several goodwill programs for the tenants of the Project, Jews and Christians alike (these and some other of its purely cultural programs it has been permitted to hold in the Recreation Hall of the Project), and has conducted a few adult educational classes besides. The women of the group have decorated the classroom with curtains and drapes. They sew for the Red Cross, and they are most active in carrying the annual United Jewish Appeal drive directly into the Project. The men, too, engage in a variety of patriotic and Jewish activities.

Social Services and Problems

And all these Jewish educational, cultural and religious activities, which have been conducted with the cooperation and under the supervision of our Association, have had to be supplemented with a certain amount of definite social service. Patients sent to the hospital were visited. One family was channeled to the proper agency for advice relative to the adoption of a child. The case of the maladjustment of one of the Hebrew School pupils who, while normal himself, has parents who are deaf mutes, was brought to the attention of our communal Jewish Child Guidance Bureau. Several of the group were referred to our Jewish Social Service for medical and dental care. Camping was provided for a few of the children, and to some of the parents we were able to be helpful by directing them to our vocational agency for the securing of jobs.

During the past year or so it is true that the income of some of the members of the Center has gone up somewhat, and this has enabled them to meet slightly increased responsibilities. But, as though to counter-balance this advantage, the many and varied working shifts of those now engaged in industries have made it increasingly difficult to carry on, for the present, all the undertakings which both they and we would like. The absense, too, of the younger element, who are serving in the armed forces of our country, has impeded the work during the past months. Nevertheless the quantity of the Center's activities has not diminished nor has their quality deteriorated.

In short, this experiment of our Association to establish a small Jewish Center in the midst of a Federal Housing Project (and thus far we have heard of no other experiment of its kind) has proven a most gratifying experience. It has been a source of Jewish information, Jewish inspiration, morale building and

general helpfulness to a most worthwhile group of Jews who, because of the unusual situation in which they found themselves, might otherwise have been completely deprived of that warm, dignified, intelligent Jewish life which they craved and to which they have responded so wholeheartedly. To us of the Jewish Education Association it has been a source of deep satisfaction that we were able to contribute to the enrichment of the intellectual and spiritual lives of a group of our Jewish citizens who, without our efforts, might have remained Jewishly uninformed, physically isolated and spirtually dejected — either completely neglected or unconscionably exploited by the forces of the community. As now constituted, this project of our creation stands out as a unique, modern social demonstration of the practical combining of *torah, avodah* and *gemilut hasadim.*

Book Notes

DEMOCRATIZING PUBLIC EDUCATION

YOUR SCHOOL, YOUR CHILDREN. By Marie Syrkin. L. B. Fisher, N. Y. 1944. pp. 224

A Teacher Looks at "What's Wrong With Our Schools" is the telling sub-title of this vigorously thoughtful and provocative book on the public high schools of New York City. Written by a veteran teacher who, unlike so many teachers, has been active in public life, this book is no arm-chair professor's treatment of the subject, but presents a wealth of personal experience, a keen analysis of the social scene, and a sound popular discussion of educational goals. Daughter of the Jewish philosopher and Labor-Zionist leader, Nahman Syrkin, and a Jewish thinker and writer in her own right, the author has infused into the book a deep sense of pain over injustice and bigotry and a passionate cry for the teaching of democracy to our children and youth.

Our schools have failed to teach democracy; our schools have failed to give our children a basic general education. These are Miss Syrkin's two theses. Actually, it is the first of these which constitutes the burden of the volume, the treatment of the second serving as background and reinforcement. The background material is in itself informative and stimulating: the historical sketch of the American Public School, the conflict between the progressives and their antagonists in education, the abuse of the measurement of intelligence to the disadvantage of students below the average, the stale fare of reading matter fed to students, the confusion regarding vocational education, and the general "collapse of standards." The picture of the public high schools as sketcehd in this book is, to say the least, most depressing.

Miss Syrkin's main thesis, as stated before, is that our schools have failed to teach democracy — to develop an understanding of democratic principles, to inculcate strong beliefs in these principles, and to foster stable emotional attitudes towards the democratic way of life. Chiefly responsible for this is the "liberal" attitude in dealing with political

and social problems. Democracy has been taught "with an easy-going readiness to see the other fellow's point of view, even if the other fellow was out to blast you off the face of the earth." The bogies of propaganda and indoctrination have held such sway in the schools that the students, on the one hand, are easily influenced by fascist propaganda, and, on the other, resist any direct inculcation of democratic ideals as being "propaganda." How this has expressed itself in the schools is illustrated in the chapter on "Fascist Influences," with numerous incidents from the classroom.

Equally disturbing is the material on White-Negro relations. After several incidents of conflict between White and Negro students had occurred, White students in several classes were asked to write, anonymously, what they thought ought to be done. With few exceptions, the recommendations were to segregate the Negro students — to send them to the Annex, to have separate schools and libraries for them. There were, of course, more drastic proposals — to send them back to be slaves, or ship them to an island—and a few tolerant voices advocating that "every one should be given a fair break in the school."

The chapter on anti-Semitism in the school is not as rich with stories from the classroom but enough is told, and more is discernable between the lines, to indicate that the attitudes of both students and teachers are far from ideal. Among the teachers, there is a stratification into Catholics, Jews and Protestants. Students frequently ask: "Well, what's wrong with the Jews, anyhow? Why are they persecuted?" In recent years, the schools have been amply supplied from subversive sources with scurrilous jingles, cartoons and similar items about Jews. In dealing with the problem, the schools have followed a hush-hush policy, doing little or nothing to counteract the evil directly or indirectly.

Miss Syrkin does not merely apply her sharp scalpel, but advocates needed changes and improvements. Improvement will come when the whole pattern of the school and its curriculum will be reconstructed. She feels (perhaps too strongly) that the individual teacher is helpless within the existing framework. Secondly, she pleads for the teaching of democracy directly and dynamically, for teaching it as a faith, and teaching its application in the political, economic, social realms. This requires an over-all educational program along the lines now under experimentation in Springfield, Mass. At the same time, the author is aware that real changes in the school will come with basic change in the society which conducts the school.

It will be of interest to the readers of *The Reconstructionist* to quote one statement about the Jewish youth. "The Jewish students, for the most part," writes Miss Syrkin, "have an understandable eagerness not to be bothered by any problem unless it impinges directly upon them. Very few of them have any interests in what are specifically Jewish problems; few of them know about Zionism or other nationalist solutions. They are young Americans with a very slight sense of Jewish tradition. If it were not for Hitler and his American votaries, they would have very little of what is known as 'Jewish consciousness.' The Jewish boy who feels himself personally involved in the tragic fate of his people is the exception. The majority would gladly merge into the general stream of American life, without troubling themselves about problems beyond their strength to tackle." There is food for thought in this statement, for all who are interested in Jewish education in America.

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